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Senate Republican Caucus Chair

Committees: Financial Institutions, Housing and Insurance; Health and Long-Term Care;
Ways and Means; Rules

June 19, 2009

Dear Friends,

I hope you are enjoying your summer so far. Over the past weeks I have met with many of you at Rotary meetings, community events and other gatherings. It's been a pleasure being back in the district with all of you.

New forecast shows negative balance for next biennium

Yesterday Dr. Arun Raha, Executive Director of the state Economic and Revenue Forecast Council, issued an updated revenue forecast for Washington. The forecast showed:

- Revenue projections have dropped \$686 million compared to what was expected in March.
- The state is facing a \$195 million negative ending fund balance for the 2009-11 biennium that begins on July 1, 2009 and ends on June 30, 2011.
- Missing from this equation is \$69 million worth of bills necessary to implement the budget that did not pass during the past legislative session and \$11 million assumed from Powerball sales (a multistate lottery) that will not come to fruition since the Powerball board recently decided not to let Washington participate.
- Adding these two issues to the equation yields a cash deficit of \$275 million.

On July 1 the state will get a look at the forecast for increased caseloads. This is the increase in the number of people who will need state services over the next biennium, such as unemployment benefits and medical assistance. Current indications are that those additional costs are approaching \$220 million higher than expected.

Taking all this information together, it's likely that after the caseload forecast in two weeks the state will be facing a **\$500 million** general fund cash deficit for the 2009-11 biennium. There is still \$248 million in the constitutional rainy day fund available to offset this figure, but to tap into it would require legislative action. As of now there are no plans for the Legislature to meet to take this action. The next forecast will be issued in September. The Senate meets for Committee Assembly Days October 1 and 2 and December 3 and 4.

Federal stimulus funds help local communities

With all the talk about federal stimulus funds it's sometimes hard to see how it affects us here at home. Here are a couple of new examples. The federal stimulus package includes \$200,000 for Wenatchee Valley College to fund a new class of nursing students at its Omak campus this fall. This will help at least 16 students pursue the nursing field. It also includes \$3.4 million in recovery funds for improvements to the Rock Island Wastewater Treatment Facility.

Update on Apple Capital Loop Trail

The Apple Capital Recreation Loop Trail traverses more than 10 miles along the Wenatchee riverfront and through the Columbia River shorelands. Since the trail was completed in 1994, it has become a magnet for recreational activity in our community. On any given day the trail is packed with walkers, cyclists, joggers or in the winter cross-country skiers or snowshoers.

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has initiated a process to analyze lands acquired across the state including along the Columbia River in East Wenatchee for right-of-way purposes.

On May 19, I met with representatives from Douglas County, the City of East Wenatchee and the WSDOT to discuss how this would impact the property between the Odabashian Bridge and the George Sellar Bridge. The update is:

- Douglas County and the City of East Wenatchee agreed to seek funding from the Regional Council of Governments to hire a consultant to study potential uses for the property and what the community would like to see occur with it.
- The Regional Council approved funds to hire a consultant to gather feedback from the community and put together a report by the end of August.
- The County has hired a local company, Project Ground Work, to do the public outreach and write the report. The company will begin conducting a survey in the next couple of weeks. Decisions that must be made include which pieces of land should remain in public ownership, which public agencies should own them, and which portions of the land would lend itself to development purposes.

Many of you have been in touch with me about future plans for the Apple Capital Loop Trail and expressed your desire to have input as the process moves forward. Now that a contractor has been hired it's an ideal time to offer your thoughts. If you want to do so I encourage you to e-mail me your contact information and I will pass it along to the company gathering public feedback.

Lake Chelan viticultural region reaches major milestone

In April the federal government named the Lake Chelan area the 11th and newest "American Viticultural Area," or AVA. AVAs are recognized as distinct wine-growing regions known for their unique climate and soil. Located on lands adjacent to the southern part of Lake Chelan, the Lake Chelan AVA includes 14 bonded wineries and 260 acres of planted grapes. Vineyards in the Lake Chelan AVA benefit from the "lake effect," where cool winds blowing down the Cascade Mountain range and across Lake Chelan keep average temperatures ideal for growing wine grapes.

On Saturday, June 6, I was proud to speak at the dedication for this new wine region. I am excited about the positive impact it will have on tourism and jobs, and looking forward to watching the region's reputation for excellent apples, cherries and pears expand to include a stellar reputation for outstanding wine. It's a true delight to see the Chelan area where I was raised embark on this new chapter in our community's history.

The effort to reopen Stehekin Valley Road

The upper portion of the Stehekin Valley Road has been closed for many years due to flooding and the changing path of the Stehekin River. This road was a critical link for hikers, horseback riders and other recreationalists to access a major portion of the North Cascades National Park. Since the road's closure access to this beautiful area has been all but cut off.

Earlier this month Congressman Doc Hastings again introduced federal legislation that would allow the National Park Service to relocate and rebuild the road. This would require adjustment of the Stephen Mather Wilderness Area boundary, therefore Congressional approval is required.

When Congressman Hastings introduced this proposal back in 2007 I urged the governor to write a letter supporting this idea. This type of bipartisan support on the state level would be a good first step toward gaining support from additional federal lawmakers. I have already been in touch with Congressman Hastings' office on this issue and will continue to work with him to pursue the reopening of the Stehekin Valley Road.

Building relationships with our neighbors to the north

Earlier this month I received the good news that I've been selected as one of eight state leaders from across the nation to participate in the Rising State Leaders program sponsored by the Canadian Embassy. As a participant in the program, I will take part in a working tour of Canada, meeting with political counterparts, business leaders and cultural representatives to develop an even deeper understanding of the U.S.-Canada relationship.

We will begin our tour on June 21 in the Canadian capital of Ottawa, Ontario. Over the next nine days we will travel to the provinces of Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, including a stop in Vancouver, the site of the 2010 Winter Olympics, and a visit to the world's second-largest oil reserves at Fort McMurray, Alberta. During the tour we will focus on key bilateral issues, including border security, national security and defense.

This experience will be especially valuable because our district includes a border with Canada. I am confident that the working relationships I develop with Canadian officials and other state leaders will benefit the people of our district and hopefully my fellow state legislators as we collaborate on issues that affect our communities, our state and our Canadian neighbors. In accordance with federal rules and regulations, the government of Canada is covering the costs of my travel and participation in the event.

New assignment: Vice Chair of legislative oversight committee

On Wednesday a group of my fellow legislators elected me to serve as Vice Chair of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC). The purpose of this committee, known as "The Legislature's Auditor," is to make state government operations more efficient and accountable. The committee is comprised of an equal number of House and Senate members of both parties.

JLARC conducts objective performance audits, program evaluations, special studies and sunset reviews on behalf of the Legislature and the citizens of Washington. The committee then makes recommendations to the Legislature and state agencies to save costs and improve the performance of state government.

JLARC is one of the most effective committees in state government – from 1990 to 2008 JLARC studies resulted in \$566 million in one-time and ongoing savings. Although I have been a member of the JLARC Committee for many years, this is the first time I will serve in a leadership role. I am honored that my colleagues have entrusted me with helping lead a committee that plays such a key role in serving taxpayers.

Updates to the 2009-10 Government Guide

Many of you received my 2009-10 Government Guide. Since we mailed it this spring there have been a few updates. If you did not receive a Government Guide and want one, please contact my Olympia office at (360) 786-7622 or the district office at (509) 663-9702.

CHELAN COUNTY:

City of Entiat: Mayor, Keith Vradenburg (page 6)

Wenatchee Reclamation Dist.: Director, Alan Witte
Secretary/Manager, Rick Smith (page 9)

DOUGLAS COUNTY:

County Assessor: James Rudd (page 12)

City of East Wenatchee: Council meets the 2nd & 4th Tuesday of each month (page 12)

City of Waterville: Board Member Tim Skinner in place of James Brown (page 13)

Cemetery District # 1: Board Member Brian Dennis, phone #: 509-784-1028 (page 13)

Fire District # 15: Douglas County Fire District #6 and #7 and Okanogan County Fire District #5 no longer exist. The combined fire district is now Douglas Okanogan County Fire District #15. (page 14)

Current Information:

Address: PO Box 490, Brewster, WA 98812

Phone: 509-923-1970; 509-689-0216

Commissioners meeting the 2nd Monday of each month, 7 pm at the Ambulance Hall in Brewster

GRANT COUNTY:

Electric City Mayor: Birdie Hensley (page 17)

Port District # 6: Commissioner Roger Blackman in place of Gary Ribail (page 19)

In closing...

If there is anything my office staff or I can do for you, please don't hesitate to ask. You can reach us several ways:

- Phone – District office: (509) 663-9702
- Phone – Olympia office: (360) 786-7622
- E-mail: Parlette.Linda@leg.wa.gov
- FAX: (360) 786-1266

I will be sending you these e-mail updates periodically during the legislative interim. If anyone you know would also like to receive them they can send me an e-mail or call and we will add them to their list.

All the best,

Linda

LINDA EVANS PARLETTE

Washington State Senator, 12th District

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For information about public hearings, proposed new laws, and the progress of bills you are interested in, please visit the Legislature's Information Web site at www.leg.wa.gov.